AFI AWARDS CELEBRATION HONORS THE MOST OUTSTANDING FILMS AND TELEVISION SHOWS OF 2021

Description

Posted by Larry Gleeson

Kenneth Branagh, Jane Campion, Bradley Cooper, Brian Cox, Benedict Cumberbatch, Ariana DeBose, Guillermo del Toro, SiÃ¢n Heder, Jung Ho-yeon, Lee Jung-jae, Marlee Matlin, Rita Moreno, Steven Spielberg, Meryl Streep and Denis Villeneuve Among Guests

Morgan Freeman Delivers Benediction

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE, Los Angeles, CA, March 11, 2022 â?? Today, the American Film Institute (AFI) celebrated the 2021 AFI AWARDS honorees with a star-studded invite-only luncheon in Beverly Hills. AFI also revealed its official rationales (below) for all 23 honorees, providing the cultural and artistic context to mark these outstanding creative endeavors as the yearâ??s notable milestones.

Celebrating film and television artsâ?? collaborative nature, AFI AWARDS is the only national program that honors creative teams as a whole, recognizing those in front of and behind the camera. All the honored works advance the art of the moving image, inspire audiences and artists alike, and enhance the rich cultural heritage of Americaâ??s art form.

At the close of the event, Morgan Freeman delivered the annual benediction in celebration of the honoreesâ?? remarkable achievements. He also honored the legendary OscarÂ®-winning actor,

director, activist, and champion of civil rights â?? and AFIâ??s Founding Vice Chair â?? Sidney Poitier, who passed away earlier this year. â??Sidney was my compass showing me the way, my one bright light who illuminated the path for me to walk upon,â?• said Freeman. â??And even though Sidney is no longer with us, his light will never dim. And no matter where you are from or who you are, he was, is, and always will be an inspiration.â?•

Guests in attendance at the AFI AWARDS luncheon include: Paul Thomas Anderson, CaitrÃona Balfe, Murray Bartlett, Ashley Nicole Black, Casey Bloys, Kenneth Branagh, Nicholas Braun, Connie Britton, Dove Cameron, Jane Campion, Kristin Chenoweth, Tim Cook, Bradley Cooper, Brian Cox, Kieran Culkin, Benedict Cumberbatch, Alexandra Daddario, Ariana DeBose, Michael De Luca, Guillermo del Toro, Eugenio Derbez, Hwang Dong-hyuk, Daniel Durant, Aunjanue Ellis, Toby Emmerich, Andrew Garfield, Reinaldo Marcus Green, Matthew Greenfield, Kathryn Hahn, Sterlin Harjo, William Jackson Harper, SiÃ¢n Heder, Cooper Hoffman, Jung Ho-yeon, Paula Huidobro, Brad Ingelsby, Devery Jacobs, Lisa Jackson, Barry Jenkins, Lee Jung-jae, Keegan-Michael Key, Troy Kotsur, Tony Kushner, John Landgraf, Donna Langley, Andie MacDowell, Leonard Maltin, Marlee Matlin, Thuso Mbedu, Kevin Messick, Molly Smith Metzler, Rita Moreno, Rob Morgan, Julianne Nicholson, Sarah Niles, Evan Peters, Brittany Oâ??Grady, Margaret Qualley, Frank Rich, Ann Sarnoff, Ted Sarandos, Jac Schaeffer, Saniyya Sidney, Demi Singleton, J. Smith-Cameron, Sarah Snook, Steven Spielberg, Meryl Streep, Jeremy Strong, Scott Stuber, Sean Patrick Thomas, Ahmir â??Questloveâ?• Thompson, Denis Villeneuve, Dana Walden, Ari Wegner, John Wells, among others.

AFIâ??s global Movie Club program will showcase the official selections beginning on March 12, with new and exclusive content released daily on AFI.com and its social media platforms.

AFI AWARDS 2021 RATIONALES â?? MOTION PICTURES

CODA signs a proud rallying cry for voices rarely seen on screen. SiÃ¢n Hederâ??s powerful story of choosing lifeâ??s path resonates beyond the screen and into our hearts â?? a celebration of rising above challenges to create our own futures. Emilia Jones, Marlee Matlin, Troy Kotsur, and Daniel Durant embody the bond between family, the determination to pave a new path to the American dream, and the joy of finding your voice â?? spoken or unspoken.

DONâ??T LOOK UP rockets into the stratosphere of hilariously dark satires, entering the orbit of DR. STRANGELOVE and other American classics. Illuminated by a stellar cast including Leonardo DiCaprio, Jennifer Lawrence, and Meryl Streep, Adam McKay annihilates modern-day tribalism, a complicit media, and willful American ignorance by infusing belly laughs to transform this disaster film into a screamingly funny action film that, ultimately, demands action.

DUNE transports audiences to new worlds and immerses them in a vision so pure that the power of art is forever proven. This epic vision is painted with the brush of a master, Denis Villeneuve, whose exquisite adaptation mines its rich source material to reimagine one of pop cultureâ??s sacred texts as an experience that is transporting, intoxicating â?? and entirely cinematic. TimothÃ©e Chalamet, Rebecca Ferguson, Oscar Isaac, and an incandescent ensemble are a testament to the intimacy of performance that inspires fantasy to become reality.

KING RICHARD ascends the throne of Americaâ??s most inspiring movies in this story of Venus and Serena Williamsâ?? rise to become the greatest tennis players in history. Reinaldo Marcus Greenâ??s sure hand charts this journey by focusing on family and the eternal, paternal drive that not only ensures opportunity but insists on it. Will Smithâ??s landmark performance as the man with the plan has audiences rising to their feet to prove that in a sport where â??loveâ?• means â??zeroâ?• â?? here, love means everything.

LICORICE PIZZA offers a slice of life from the past that serves as a soaring reminder for the present â?? that joy lives each day in the eternal quest to â??come of age.â?• Paul Thomas Anderson invites us back to his â??70s San Fernando Valley with the assurance of Americaâ??s greatest auteurs. His commitment to image, music, and story creates a masterwork of nostalgic humanity â?? one embodied by two relative newcomers in Alana Haim and Cooper Hoffman, whose chemistry is undimmed by the brilliant talent that surrounds them amidst the vast sparkling lights of the valley.

NIGHTMARE ALLEY leads us down a path paved by American classics and emerges anew as a modern miracle. Guillermo del Toroâ??s funhouse of filmdom expertly refracts humanity is warped, distorted mirrors â?? and invites us to enjoy the ride. Bradley Cooperâ??s transformative turn reaffirms his place as a leading man looking for more; he and an all-star cast lure us into an inescapable, immersive world of smoke-filled rooms, amber whiskeys, and blood-red lipstick that expand our worldview to remind us of the humor and the horror of lifeâ??s journey.

THE POWER OF THE DOG looks to the hills for secrets unseen â?? and finds them in powerful, poetic images that transport audiences with a modern look back at the American West. This landmark work proves Jane Campionâ??s unparalleled ability to capture a world of breathless beauty and breathtaking brutality, both wrapped tight as a rope. This slow-burn tale is a brilliant exercise in suspense and release â?? masterfully manifested by a brilliant cast and an unforgettably complex performance by Benedict Cumberbatch.

tick, tickâ?¦ BOOM! earns its exclamation point â?? and explosive testament to the driving powers of inspiration, aspiration, and determination. Lin-Manuel Miranda soars to new heights with this enduring valentine to Jonathan Larson by exploring not just what it means to write, to direct, to produceâ?¦but to create. This high-energy, high-drama musical is driven forward with force by the unflinching artistry of Andrew Garfield, who brings Larson to life in a virtuoso performance that stands among the yearâ??s finest.

THE TRAGEDY OF MACBETH burns and bubbles with power and passion â?? a stark cinematic rendering of William Shakespeareâ??s immortal work. Joel Coen richly imagines this bloody tale of hubris as a gothic fever dream where â??fair is foul and foul is fairâ?•â?? a monumental achievement, and one in which only titans as towering as Denzel Washington and Frances McDormand could stir the material from transcendent text into timelessness.

WEST SIDE STORY leaps into American film history a complete original â?? while standing tall upon stories foundational to the human experience. Steven Spielberg leads with love and forges his position as our greatest modern master, seeking out and soaring above new challenges and assembling a creative ensemble that speaks to the genius of both past and present â?? from Tony Kushner and Rita Moreno to Leonard Bernstein and Stephen Sondheim. For all who wish to embrace art in modern-day, this film is a rapturous celebration of Americaâ??s vast and varied voices, and at the same moment, a stinging question of what it will take to become â??one hand, one heart.â?•

SPECIAL AWARDS

BELFAST stands as a monument to the power of childhood memory â?? where hope lives on despite the view from behind the barbed wire. Set inside the war zone of The Troubles in Northern Ireland, Kenneth Branaghâ??s tenderly crafted cinematic memoir is a loving look at the ones who left, the ones who stayed, and the ones who were lost along the way. Jude Hillâ??s performance as young Buddy radiates with light and promise, and CaitrÃona Balfe, Judi Dench, Jamie Dornan, and CiarÃ¡n Hinds embody the ties that bind in a work that rises above autobiography to ask why we divide ourselves and when will we stop.

SUMMER OF SOUL (â?¦OR, WHEN THE REVOLUTION COULD NOT BE TELEVISED) takes the stage at a time when its message matters most. Transporting audiences back to the Harlem Cultural Festival of 1969, with footage previously thought lost to history, Questlove turns back time and welcomes all into the embrace of a joyful, life-affirming event. This sublime and urgently necessary documentary blends music, memory, culture, community, and, ultimately, the vibrant amplification of Black voices â?? beamed from the past to serve as catalysts for those who look to the future today.

AFI AWARDS 2021 RATIONALES â?? TELEVISION

HACKS upends the world of stand-up comedy one savage joke at a time. Lucia Aniello, Paul W. Downs, and Jen Statskyâ??s wickedly funny series place a brilliant spotlight on Jean Smartâ??s turn as a legendary performer who finds herself both in need of and at war with Hannah Einbinderâ??s Gen Z

up-and-comer. Together, they battle for laughs as they break barriers, ultimately finding there is nothing funnier than the truth.

MAID sweeps audiences away in a story of strength, resolve, and undying dreams. Molly Smith Metzlerâ??s series is a joy to watch despite the hardships endured by Alex, portrayed with revelatory restraint by Margaret Qualley. As she embraces the challenges of motherhood, an abusive ex-boyfriend, and an unsupportive family to find a future, each episode is a testament to the resilience and a rich commentary on the humanity of a class that society too often chooses not to see.

MARE OF EAST TOWN calls upon all the powers of storytelling to solve a relentlessly suspenseful whodunit amidst the hardscrabble people of its Pennsylvania small-town setting. With an unyielding eye and ear toward authenticity and mastery of pastoral gothic, Brad Ingelsby marshals this investigation of the secrets and lies amongst family and friends. Kate Winsletâ??s transformational performance is a tour de force, as she wades through the darkness to confront the pain of her past.

RESERVATION DOGS pulls focus to find those often ignored both on-screen and off. Following four Indigenous teenagers who inhabit the world of an Oklahoma reservation but dream of a future in California, Sterlin Harjo, and Taika Waititiâ??s series blows in like a strong, fresh wind. A new generation of young stars gives these stories their soul, and their charactersâ?? adventures and misadventures resonate with humor, heart, and, most importantly, empathy â?? the key role of art in driving culture forward.

SCHMIGADOON! explodes with joy and music and laughter â?? and contemporary cynicism. This candy-colored cocktail is hand-crafted by Cinco Paul and Ken Daurio, who have created an ebullient valentine to musicals by inviting even the most sardonic to see the world beyond the fog of Brigadoon. Cecily Strong and Keegan-Michael Key light up a glittering marquee of Broadway talent that power an insight into personal change through clever homage, catchy songs, and bravura, show-stopping choreography.

SUCCESSION sits tall on a castle in the clouds â?? with a foundation built upon the allure of power and the acknowledgment of its absurdity. This third year of Jesse Armstrongâ??s gimlet-eyed portrait of American hubris remains quintessentially â?? and uncomfortably â?? apt for this moment in our nationâ??s history. There is also joy in knowing that Brian Cox and the all-star ensemble continue to walk the razorâ??s edge of drama vs. satire, delivering each line as if from the stage of the Globe.

TED LASSO makes us believe â?? in goodness, in each other, and in the power of television. Bill Lawrence, Jason Sudeikis, Brendan Hunt, and Joe Kellyâ??s irrepressibly empathetic series has

reached even higher goals in its second year. Deeper, darker character development for the ensemble has added a rich shade of complexity to the life lessons and laughs delivered by Tedâ??s homespun wisdom and homemade biscuits.

THE UNDERGROUND RAILROAD emerges from the fog of Americaâ??s past as a hauntingly triumphant monument to those who strived to live in a land where â??all men are created equal.â?• Adapted from the novel by Colson Whitehead, Barry Jenkins and his extraordinary creative ensemble unlock the powers of both horror and fantasy to paint an unflinching look at the hellscape of the nationâ??s foundation, and in the process, ride this epic masterwork into television history.

WANDAVISION changes the channel on the superhero narrative. Brilliantly stitching emotional themes into the cape-and-tights conventions of Marvelâ??s cinematic universe, Jac Schaefferâ??s visionary storytelling utilizes nostalgia as a smokescreen for a rich investigation of loss and grief. Impeccably embodying avatars across TV history, Elizabeth Olsen and Paul Bettany summon acting powers beyond what is human â?? and do so at the risk of each scene being stolen by Kathryn Hahn.

THE WHITE LOTUS blooms to reveal the unbearable whiteness of being â?? unmasking the superficialities of privilege in the capitalist class with the half-wink of a Botoxed eye. Set against a backdrop of paradise lost, Mike Whiteâ??s searing social satire unfolds at a vacationâ??s pace, allowing room for each of its epically excellent ensemble to incriminate themselves through action or inaction â?? and entitlement.

SPECIAL AWARD

SQUID GAME surged onto screens a global phenomenon. This saga of survival is â?? at once â?? a heart-filled drama about those down on their luck, a heart-pounding thriller, and a damning critique of capitalism. Hwang Dong-hyukâ??s unmatched achievement is the storyâ??s power to smash cultural and geographic boundaries â?? to connect us as humans â?? all playing the violent game of life, surprised to learn how it will end.

About the American Film Institute (AFI)

The American Film Institute (AFI) is a nonprofit organization with a mandate to champion the moving image as an art form. Established in 1967, AFI launched the first comprehensive history of American film and sparked the movement for film preservation in the United States. In 1969, AFI opened the doors of the **AFI Conservatory**, a graduate-level program to train narrative filmmakers. AFIâ??s

enduring traditions include the **AFI Life Achievement Award**, which honors the masters for work that has stood the test of time; **AFI AWARDS**, which celebrates the creative ensembles of the most outstanding screen stories of the year; and scholarly efforts such as the **AFI Catalog of Feature Films** and the **AFI Archive** that preserve film history for future generations. AFI exhibition programs include **AFI FEST**, **AFI DOCS** and year-round exhibition at the **AFI Silver Theatre and Cultural Center** in Maryland. Other pioneering programs include workshops aimed at increasing diversity in the storytelling community, including **AFI DWW** and the **AFI Cinematography Intensive for Women**. AFIâ??s newest program is **AFI Movie Club**, a daily global engagement for those who love the movies. Read about all of these programs and more at AFI.com and follow us on social media at Facebook.com/AmericanFilmInstitute, YouTube.com/AFI, Twitter.com/AmericanFilm and Instagram.com/AmericanFilmInstitute

(Press release from AFI Press Office, Stacy Adamski)

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